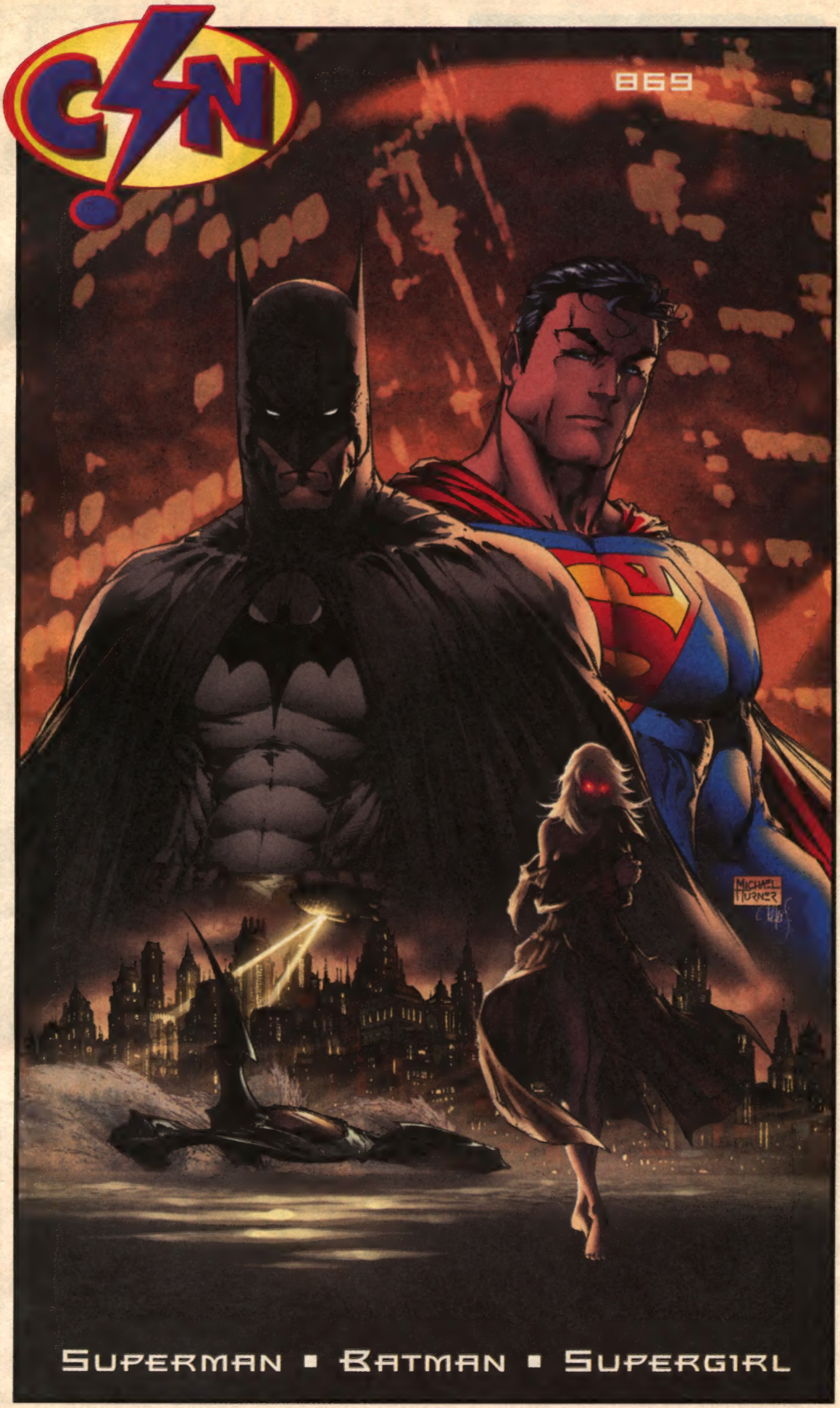

CN
869
MICHAEL TURNER
SUPERMAN • BATMAN • SUPERGIRL

She's Our Supergirl, and We Love Her!

DON'T BRING THE DOG INTO THIS. EVERY TIME YOU GET ANXIOUS, YOU BEND UP THE DOG.
NO, I WON'T. I'M CURIOUS THAT APPARENTLY THE SUM TOTAL OF YOUR KRYPTONIAN HERITAGE IS YOU...
...REGARDLESS ROCK WHICH IS LETHAL TO YOU...
...AND A FOUR-LEGGED --
HYDE!
-- CAT BARBECUE --
DAMN...
BATMAN?

Sometimes it just doesn't pay to tamper with success.

Supergirl's sacrifice in ***Crisis on Infinite Earths*** is one of the most significant death in the DCU this side of Barry Allen's demise... but the storyline left DC with a hole that they've been trying to fill for more than a decade and a half, with very limited success.

DC gave readers a new Supergirl in the 1990s, but she never proved as popular as the original. In fact, the book's only real success came in its final few issues, when writer *Peter David* introduced a Supergirl who *seemed* to be the original Kara Zor-El. Then, for the first time in a long while, sales began going *up*—not enough to save the book, but enough to make people notice.

Then a new and different Supergirl was introduced in the ***Superman*** titles in 2003—but she, too, failed to click with fans the way that Kara Zor-El had done. So finally, in late 2003, a decision was made—a decision that will undoubtedly prove popular with DC readers: bring back the Supergirl that fans wanted to see.

"We've spent a lot of time trying to reinvent her when the public perception didn't want that change," *Dan Didio*, DC's Vice President—Editorial, told *CSN* (for our full conversation, see page five of this issue!) So we're not going to try to swim against the tide; we're going to listen to our readers.

"I think that the Supergirl that the world knows is the only one who should exist, so that's what we're doing. The plan is to introduce her in a really exciting story in ***Superman/Batman;*** we've got a really dramatic story that's going to be told, and it does bring Supergirl back to prominence again—in a version that everyone will recognize and accept..."

How'd the idea for the new Supergirl come about? Was she created by *Jeph Loeb*, ***Superman/Batman's*** writer, by *Michael Turner*, by *Dan DiDio*, by DC editorial, or by the whole group? "Success has many fathers, but failure is an orphan. So, we'll see what everyone says after it's been published!" Loeb said with a laugh..

"As I remember it, there was a story I wanted to tell that actually went back to when I was on ***Superman*** monthly, some of which has been incorporated into the President Luthor story/line in ***Superman/Batman*** that's just finishing up. An element of that—which will become clear in the coming months—was the catalyst for the story. *Eddie Berganza* (Superman group editor) reminded me of this and how we could incorporate into ***Superman/Batman***.

"So, now I had this very cool Supergirl story but it needed the right artist. *Mike Turner* and I had been talking about doing something together—we were already partners on ***Soulfire***, and this fit perfectly. He's a superstar artist who is a terrific storyteller—and he happens to draw the most beautiful women in comics. That's when *Dan Didio*, got involved, since Mike had never done traditional superheroes before and had never worked for DC. It was a complex deal that never would have worked without his support.

"Once that was settled, Mike and I sat down and talked about the things he wanted explore and visualize, as I would with any artist. He has amazing ideas and I took all of that, cooked it and started writing. His response to the scripts has been phenomenal, both on the page and as a friend."

Loeb didn't work in a vacuum; before he began developing his Supergirl, he did his homework, reading the earlier incarnations of the character. "I read *everything*, so of course, I was aware not only of what Peter had done in "Many Happy Returns," but also [the Kara Zor-El story that ran in ***Supergirl #s 75-80***] with those Supergirls back to ***Supergirl #1***. But, the story we're telling is a new beginning. It's the return of a much loved character that you've never met before. I can't explain that statement until you've read the story. But, I think the long time fans will be very delighted—and the new readers will get a cool story."

Based on this statement and on DiDio's earlier comments, is it fair to say that this new Supergirl will be a Kryptonian who is a relative of Superman? "I'm ... the phone line is breaking up!" Loeb, ever the master of evasion, joked. "I didn't hear the question!"

No one can accuse Loeb of taking the low-key approach. He made comic book history with his work on Batman: Hush. He then launched the most successful new DC series in years, ***Superman/Batman***. And now he's introducing a new Supergirl. Does Loeb feel a need to constantly outdo himself? "I know it sounds all 'aww shucks,' but I all I can do is tell the best story I can and hope folks like the show," he said. "At the moment, they do—but I'm experienced enough to know that that won't always be true. But, in general, ***Superman/Batman*** is intended to tell *big* stories that have an impact on arguably the two most influential characters in comic book history, Superman and Batman. And I also want to have a heckuva lot of fun—and I am!"

Loeb obviously likes to work on the big canvas: twelve parts for "Hush," six parts for the first ***Superman/Batman*** arc, six parts for the Supergirl storyline. Does he feel that the more traditional three or four part arc is too brief for a major storyline? "The story dictates the length. The one issue story we did with *Pat Lee*, ***Superman/Batman #7***, really came out well as a one-parter. But, what I like about six parts is that you get a really good sense of beginning, middle, and end. Something shorter doesn't always allow for that. I'm very comfortable knowing where the storyline is going to end, so working with that structure is rewarding. This dates back to doing thirteen parts of ***Batman: The Long Halloween*** Plus, I think it's a bonus for the readers to know the entire storyline is contained in something that will be a certain number of issues."

What led to the decision to put the *Pat Lee*-illustrated single-issue story between the kickoff story arc and the Supergirl premiere? "We were looking at when the Supergirl story was going to start ,and we realized that we had a space between arcs. *Ed McGuinness* suggested Pat, who I've wanted to work with for some time. When people see that issue they're eyes will fall out, it's so sweet—it looks painted. We had a ball and we're already looking for something else to do together."

Even though Loeb is a veteran storyteller of things Kryptonian, having written Superman for a while, he still had to do some pre-story prep. "If I'm using characters from someone *else's* book, I like talking to that writer. For example, Wonder Woman plays a significant role in what's happening, so I've spent a lot of time talking to *Greg Rucka* on making those things fit, making sure she sounds right. *Geoff Johns* shares an office with me, so when I used Robin and Superboy, I wanted it to play off what he's doing in ***Teen Titans***. Plus, both those guys are terrific writers, so their input on anything is valuable."

Is Loeb already thinking ahead to a ***Supergirl*** series? Will he be writing the book if/when it launches? "That's up to the fates, the retailers, the readers and DC. Do I have an idea where she'd go from here? Yes. Do I have the perfect artist in mind? Absolutely! But, I don't like talking about things before they are real since that's all anybody then focuses on. 'Jeph, what's going with an ongoing Supergirl series?' And I can't answer that question, particularly when I want to talk about what I'm doing now—or at least, next, like with ***Catwoman: When In Rome*** with *Tim Sale*."

Loeb is also looking ahead to upcoming ***Superman/Batman*** story arcs, including the next story that he's already working on with *Ed McGuinness*. "And *Carlos Pacheco* has started on his arc, so we've got all sorts of master chefs cooking up stuff for this book. And I'm not so sure that Turner and I are done driving around the DCU. But, again, we'll have to see how this is received. I'm very proud of the work on everyone's part. It's a hard thing to do, return a character who is so important not only to the DCU, but to comic history in general—but hopefully, we've done it right. Mike and I certainly think so!"

Superman/Batman #8, a $2.95 comic, is scheduled for March 24th release.

BY CLIFF BIGGERS

SUPERGIRL
KRYPTON
PART ONE: ALONE
The condition of the hull, the ocean floor, the absence of any benefactor or parasitic activity points to only one conclusion.
WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU, FINN? YOU FOUND SOMETHING! DON'T YOU?
SUPERMAN AND BATMAN

Courtesy your friendly neighborhood comics outlet!

Comic Shop Newsarama

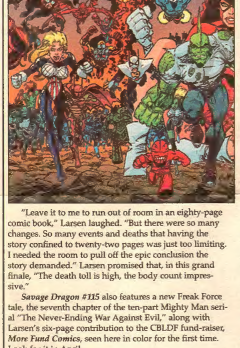
Produced by *Comic Shop News* in cooperation with *Matt Brady* and *newsarama.com*

Here Comes a Giant Dragon!

You'd think that a guy who's been writing and illustrating his own comic for more than a hundred issues would be looking to cut corners—but it appears that *Erik Larsen* is looking to make his job even more demanding! Larsen's upcoming *Savage Dragon #115*, originally slated to weigh in at a hefty eighty pages, has grown in the telling—and now it's escalated to a hundred-pager at no additional cost!

"This one got away from me," Larsen said. "When it came to wrapping up the current Vicious Circle saga, a twenty-two-page lead feature simply didn't allow me enough room to tell the story the way I wanted."

Even though the book was slated to be an eighty-pager, Larsen's lead story was slotted for a standard twenty-two page segment. But once he got into it, he realized that he needed a lot more room than that for the big finish to his "Vicious Circle Rising" story arc.



"Leave it to me to run out of room in an eighty-page comic book," Larsen laughed. "But there were so many changes. So many events and deaths that having the story confined to twenty-two pages was just too limiting. I needed the room to pull off the epic conclusion the story demanded." Larsen promised that, in this grand finale, "The death toll is high, the body count impressive."

Savage Dragon #115 also features a new Freak Force tale, the seventh chapter of the ten-part Mighty Man serial "The Never-Ending War Against Evil," along with Larsen's six-page contribution to the CBLDF fund-raiser, *More Fund Comics*, seen here in color for the first time. Look for it in April.

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Reduction in Pulse Rate

Mark Bagley may be the hardest-working artist in comics today, but even an uber-artist can get blindsided by the flu! Alas, a bout with illness in December threw Bagley a bit behind schedule, and something had to give. He briefly considered passing the art honors on the final two installments of his five-part *Pulse* inaugural story arc to another artist, but he, writer *Brian Bendis*, and the editors at Marvel came up with another solution instead: make the book bi-monthly to give Mark time to do the art while keeping up with the grueling twenty-one-issues-per-year schedule on *Ultimate Spider-Man* as well.

"It was a tough call—new artist in the middle of a story, which I hate, and I know a lot of you do too—or this," *Brian Bendis* wrote on his message board. "I opted for this with Marvel's blessing and Bagley's coolness—plus I wrote the script for Bagley."

"I'm having a great time with this story," Bagley told *Comic Shop Newsarama*. "I'm getting to flex artistic muscles I don't always get a chance to flex when I'm doing Ultimate Spider-Man. The whole art style in this book is darker more noir, and it's been a real change. I'm even getting to draw the Marvel Universe Spider-Man in one brief sequence, and that's fun, too. I'm making sure that he's different in build and body structure than my younger Ultimate Spider-Man. It's a real twist, drawing a character I know this well and having to approach him differently at the same time!

"I'm also loving the chance to draw real people out of costume doing real-people thing in a newspaper environment," he continued. "I love drawing superhero adventure, but there's something about drawing the nuances of real people in a realistic world that makes you see things differently. No one can tell an artist if he's drawing a superhero or a super-villain a little bit unrealistically, but get a person at a computer desk wrong and everyone will know it!

"I particularly love the storytelling aspect of comic book art—making the story flow from page to page so that the pictures tell a story just as well as the words do—and Brian's script for Pulse is letting me really do some visual storytelling. Of course, that's normal for Brian; he thinks about his stories from an artistic sense. An artist can't ask for anything better than that!"

Due to the delay, *Pulse #3* will reach comic shops in early May.

Something Old, Something New

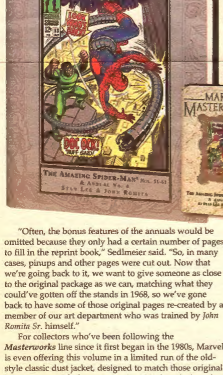
The idea of a new *Marvel Masterworks* might seem contradictory—but to fans of Marvel's many volumes of classic Silver Age reprints, it's a very exciting idea indeed! And at long last, that idea will become a reality this spring when Marvel releases its first new Masterworks in almost two years—and its first new volume of *Spider-Man Masterworks* in about a decade!

If you're thinking those *Masterworks* that appeared one or more per month for the past year or so were new, think again: those were all reissues (with corrections and tweaks) of previously-released volumes. But *Marvel Masterworks: Amazing Spider-Man Volume Six*, reprinting *ASM #s 51-61* and *Amazing Spider-Man Annual #4*, has never existed prior to its April release—and that's just the news that Masterworks fans have been waiting for.

"We're looking at this as really the first new volume in the first complete Masterworks effort that we started in 2003 – and it's the first new *Spider-Man Masterworks* in over a decade," *Corey Sedlmeier*, *Masterworks* editor, told *Comic Shop Newsarama*'s *Matt Brady*. "We decided that we needed to get this out as a continuation of what we had started with our efforts of getting all thirty-two Masterworks volumes back into print, and also, you couldn't ask for better synergy than *Spider-Man 2* coming out, Dr. Octopus being the major villain in the film, and a big, four-part Spider-Man/Doc Ock brouhaha in this volume."

Another famous Spidey adversary also makes an appearance in this volume— a villain who was just introduced in the final story collected in *Marvel Masterworks: Spider-Man Volume Five*. "At this point in the series, the Kingpin had just made his first appearance in issue #50," Sedlmeier said. "This collection of issues is one of his big arcs—he's there in a subplot as a behind the scenes character who's pulling the strings. Also, the Annual is a team-up with the Human Torch, which is a pretty fun story. Back in the day, Stan used to love teaming them up, because they were the two big teenage characters in the Marvel Universe."

Sedlmeier stressed Marvel's determination to "get it right" with these *Masterworks* volumes, eliminating the variations that crept into earlier reprints. ""We'll often do some heavy research on finding the work. The convenient thing about this run was that much of the materials were already available through our *Essentials* line, so we were able to pick up a lot of it from there. But there had been some changes along the line—say, a reference box from Stan that referred to an issue of the *Avengers* that was released at the same time as the original issue wouldn't make sense when it was being reprinted as a comic in the 1970s, so they took it out. So one of the efforts that we have with the *Masterworks* now is that everything is there, and these collections are authentic reproductions of the original works." For the Masterworks line, the content has to match the originals – no exceptions – which sometimes means adding in pages that haven't been seen for years.



"Often, the bonus features of the annuals would be omitted because they only had a certain number of pages to fill in the reprint book," Sedlmeier said. "So, in many cases, pinups and other pages were cut out. Now that we're going back to it, we want to give someone as close to the original package as we can, matching what they could've gotten off the stands in 1968, so we've gone back to have some of those original pages re-created by a member of our art department who was trained by *John Romita Sr.* himself."

For collectors who've been following the *Masterworks* line since it first began in the 1980s, Marvel is even offering this volume in a limited run of the old-style classic dust jacket, designed to match those original books, along with the new standard black and silver dust jackets.

Niles & Templesmith: Barrow Bound

Barrow, Alaska, may not seem like a particularly inviting place, but it's almost irresistible to *Steve Niles & Ben Templesmith*... and with good reason! After all, it was the foreboding Barrow that served as the home to the series that put the two creators on the map, making them some of the biggest names in contemporary comic book horror. So it shouldn't be surprising that the guys who brought you *30 Days of Night* are heading back to Barrow again this spring.

Return to Barrow continues the tale of a town at war with vampires who turned the town into a nightmarish hell for its human inhabitants.It's no wonder that Barrow is so appealing to vampires: the town's perpetual darkness at the winter solstice looks like happy hour at Golden Corral. The good sheriff, his wife, and a handful of brave souls fought the vampires off—but not without great sacrifice.

In 2003's follow-up to series, *Dark Days*, the living dead headed to Los Angeles where the horrible events in the town of Barrow had been compiled in a best-selling book by Stella, who's made it her mission to convince the world that (a) vampires do live among us, and (b) she's not nuts.

In March, Stella's heading back home for a final confrontation. "This is going to be the big finale for *30 Days*, where everything comes full circle, so Steve tells me," Templesmith said. *Comic Shop Newsarama's Benjamin Ong Pang Kean*. "I'm working on the first issue now and it reads even more like a movie than the original did. It's pretty cool!"

"The title really says it all," Niles added. "It's a visit back to this town that suffered major devastation and a look at how the vampire attack affects Barrow today.

"There are some characters that will carry over from a short story that I wrote for the *Complete 30 Days*, the original series and *Dark Days*. We touch base with them again in the *30 Days of Night Annual*, but I don't want to ruin any surprises. Let's just say, *everything* is connected."

Some of these characters include "a father and son who are connected to Barrow who lost a loved one in the *30 Days* attack. There is also a trapper who is introduced in the *Annual*."

So, what made this latest installment the perfect jumping-off point for the creative team? Has this been planned as a trilogy from the very beginning? And why end this at a time when the movie is in the works?

"I just don't want to milk a good thing too much," Niles said. "There very well might be more, but I haven't thought of the idea yet. That's what motivated *Dark Days*—the question of what happened to Stella Oleman, who I came to really like writing the first series and the screenplay."

Speaking of the screenplay, "At this point, my work is done and I'm eagerly awaiting news. From what I hear, *[Sam] Raimi* will soon be turning his attention from *Spider-Man 2* to *30 Days of Night*."

30 Days of Night: Return to Barrow #1 is scheduled for March release from IDW.

Woodbridge Passes

George Woodbridge, one of the Mad's most veteran contributors, died of emphysema in mid-January at age 73. "He had a tremendous eye for detail that showed up in his drawings," *Mad* Editor *John Ficarra* told *CNN*. "We especially played to his history knowledge. When we gave him a piece on World War I, he would draw the exact gun and belt buckle they were using then."

Woodbridge loved packing intricate detail into his art. His dedication to research and artistic accuracy was most likely a result of his second career as an illustrator for military history books.

Those Dynamic Marvelous Seventies

In mid-2003, *Steve Rude* joined forces with Dynamic Forces to create a lithograph that recaptured the dynamic vitality of Marvel in the 1960s. Later this year, Dynamic Forces will join with another fan-favorite artist to take a look at Marvel's second decade, the 1970s.

Dynamic Forces' *Alex Ross Marvel 1970s Lithograph*, slated for late spring release, is a character-packed piece by one of the field's most popular illustrators. "Alex has once again outdone himself here," *Nick Barrucci*, President of Dynamic Forces, said. "These are definitive versions of the incredible characters and teams from that time. When we talked the concept over, I knew he was excited to put these characters in one setting. Alex's pencils are so tight, distinct and beautiful, that we had to

give the fans a sneak peek at this dynamic litho!

"Alex has been laboring on this piece for two years, and we're just about near completion! With his schedule on the *JLA: Liberty and Justice*, his unprecedented convention and tour schedule (after all, he was promoting *Alex Ross' Mythology HC*), this high quality litho took much longer than expected, but it's definitely worth the wait! Alex put *soooooo* much detail into each character, we just had to show the fans the pencils before the final painted version! This is going to be the ultimate Alex Ross litho of the year! He even has Howard the Duck in there!" He also has the Defenders, X-Men, Avengers, Captain Marvel, Shang-Chi, Power Man, Iron Fist, Ghost Rider, and many other Marvel heroes who left their mark on that bygone decade.

Look for news updates on this litho in upcoming issues of *CSN*.

Love Fights On

Superheroes and romance—if you think they can't mix, then you haven't read *Andi Watson's Love Fights*, a contemporary romance set in a superheroic world. But the gang at Oni Press is making it easy for you to find out what you've been missing as they compile the first six issues of *Love Fights* in trade paperback in April. And the story doesn't end there as *Love Fights* continues with a February-release seventh issue and an April release eighth issue that continues the romantic adventure.

The concept for *Love Fights* is simple and direct: two people in a world where superheroes are real fumble through a relationship, their lives constantly interrupted by men in tights beating the living heck out of each other. Jack is the penciller of the official comic book adventures of The Flamer, an old school crime fighter whose popularity is on the wane due to his involvement in a love-child sex scandal. Nora is the up-and-coming reporter with the scoop. Neither Jack nor Nora are aware of each other's connection to the hero when they meet, but as their courtship progresses, it only proves to complicate matters.

"There is a grand old tradition of superdudes falling in love," Watson said. "While my couple doesn't have superpowers itself, Jack and Nora are forced into extraordinary circumstances by the extraordinary world they live in. But, at times, this is when we are our most human, and I think that's where a lot of *Love Fights*' drama comes from. Plus, given Nora's job and Jack's cat, I can lace the plot with other genre elements, as the investigative reporter works her way to the center of a conspiracy."

"The best thing about *Love Fights* is its organic storytelling," Oni Press editor in chief *Jamie S. Rich* said. "Andi has let the story grow on its own, exceeding his own expectations of where it might go. As the series has become both a fan and critical favorite, this only means more great comics for everyone. The new tpb is simply a *Volume One*, meaning we have a *lot* of pages to go before we find out if our lovers every make it to the altar!"

"I approach each issue as an individual unit," Watson explained, "and keep in mind that there are still people reading these month-to-month. I want each chapter to be a good story. At the same time, any serialized work is going to be better appreciated in one big chunk. I think in having this much of the story in one go, a reader is going to probably notice a lot more of the subtleties."

As an added bonus, the *Love Fights TPB* will include a gallery of some of Andi's covers to *Love in Tights*, the late '90s anthology that housed superhero love stories and launched the *J. Torres/Takeshi Miyazawa* series, *Sidekicks*.

Love Fights is scheduled for mid-April release.

Getting Fired Up Over Ant

Mario Gully's taking the credit for *Ant*, but perhaps he shouldn't. According to the comic book itself, the hero's creator is a young girl. Of course, the girl is the creation of Gully as well—and that's part of the charm of this character-driven series.

"*Ant* is the story of a little girl and how she copes with the big adult world in which she lives," Gully told *Comic Shop Newsarama's Benjamin Ong Pang Kuan*.

"Hanna Washington lives with her father, Danny. She's a precocious youngster who seems to understand far more about the real world than any eight-year-old should. Her father is a good man, a hard worker and a loving father trying to raise his daughter in the best way he can. Hanna's estranged mother, Betty, is a bit of a mess and only seems to enter Hanna's life when she needs something from Danny. Hanna's schoolmates, led by the bully, Carrie Wolfe, ostracize her and pick on her relentlessly.

"With the exception of her neighbor, Steven, they all treat Hanna like their personal punching bag. To deal with the stress, Hanna has taken to writing and drawing fantastic stories in her personal journal. The contents of her journal—where the super heroic action takes place—are what many comic scholars have dubbed, a 'juvenile power fantasy.' She has created a fictitious world where she can act out her noble aspirations as her adult superhero alter ego, the Ant."

Not only does Ant inspire a change in Hanna's life, it also inspired a change in Gully's. ""Actually I invented *Ant* in jail in 1996. I was convicted of robbery and sentenced to one year and probation. The event was a turning point in my life. I used to draw portraits and hot chicks on envelopes for commissary. One day—around day #6 of 358—I was depressed about where my choices in life put me. I was looking out the barred window and a single ant crawled in from the outside of my window seal. I said to myself 'Man, I wish I were an ant! Then I could crawl right out of this place and start my life all over!' Well, I couldn't pull that one off, so I decided to make a homemade comic book about it. It got around and I had a little audience with my cellmates. Really built up my confidence about drawing.

"That's when I realized that one day I could be a comic book artist. I sent out my first submission from the county jail. I hope one day my story can be an inspiration to anybody out there who has a dream. You can do it if you want it bad enough. I was determined to do something positive with my life after that."

While Ant is primarily Gully's work, he has enlisted the aid of former *Wolverine* writer *Matt Nixon* and Avalon and Arcana Studios on colors. "Well, after really understanding that nobody can know Ant better than I can, after all she's my baby, I have taken on pretty much all the chores on the book. Except for the color. Which is done by Avalon and Arcana Studio. I also work with *Sam Patrick*, editor/creator/writer of Arcana Studio. This guy is awesome. *Matt Nixon* and I worked out the plot for issue #1. Matt is a very talented writer. Very creative. And we work well together. Hopefully if our schedules permit, we will work on future issues of *Ant*."

Ant #1 is scheduled for late February release.

Ins & Outs

In: Wanna get in the latest *SPX Anthology*? Here's your chance! The powers that be have announced the them for the *2004 SPX Anthology* is "War." They will be accepting submissions from independent creators through June 15th of this year, and will announce which pieces made the cut shortly after that. The SPX anthology is an annual book that both serves as a showcase for comics creators as well as a money-raising vehicle for the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund. For complete submission guidelines and details, visit: http://www.spxpo.com/anthology.htm

Out: *Chester Brown's* critically acclaimed graphic novel *Louis Riel: A Comic Strip Biography*, which sold out of its entire first printing—helped, no doubt, by the fact that the book landed at #7 on the hardcover non-fiction best-seller list of the Canadian publishing trade *Quill & Quire*. *Louis Riel* has also appeared on the bestseller lists of *The Calgary Herald* and *Edmonton Journal*. A second printing should be available by the time this issue of *CSN* reaches comic shops.

In: *Flowers on the Razorwire*, which will be back in comic shops in May, courtesy of Boneyard Press & Chanting Monks Press, who have joined forces to relaunch the series as both an ongoing comic and an original anthology film series. Even numbered issue will be released as a traditional comics, while odd numbered issues will showcase both comic books and ground breaking DVD material.. According to creator *Hari Fisher*, the DVDs will feature an original short film, behind the scenes material, interviews, music videos, bloopers, and an original digest sized comic packed inside the DVD case.

In: *Jonathan Vankin*, writer of numerous projects for both Vertigo and Paradox Press, who has joined DC Comics as a Vertigo editor. "To me, there's no place in comics like *Vertigo*, producing consistently high quality, innovative, even experimental work," Vankin said. "So when I was generously given the opportunity to join Vertigo as an editor, there was no way I could let it go by... I can't wait to work alongside *Karen Berger, Shelly Bond, Will Dennis* and the rest of the Vertigo and DC crew..."

"Jonathan brings a writer's passion for story, and an investigative journalist's probing mind to Vertigo," *Karen Berger, VP* - Executive Editor, Vertigo, added. "His sensibility for the strange and weird in everyday life is a perfect fit for us, and we're thrilled to have his skills and talents behind an editor's desk."

Out: The monthly schedule for *DC—The New Frontier, Darwyn Cooke's* grand adventure set against the backdrop of the Silver Age's dawning days. According to DC, the series will switch from a monthly to a bimonthly shipping schedule beginning with issue #4, which is now slated to arrive in stores in May

In: *Art Adams*, who has signed a three-year exclusive with DC; his first work under the new agreement will be as the regular cover artist of *Action Comics* starting with #814.

"I look forward to continuing what has been a very happy working relationship with DC," Adams said. "I'm very excited to be working on a new project, and I hope people actually like it when they see it!"

"It has been my great pleasure for a number of years to work with Arthur so closely," *Scott Dunbier*, Executive Editor - WildStorm, added. "In addition to his cover work for the DCU, we've got some big plans for him here at WildStorm. His upcoming work will blow you away—you can bet on it!"

Dan DiDio

Dan DiDio's rise to prominence at DC may have seemed phenomenal to outsiders; DiDio signed on as co-writer with his old friend Jimmy Palmiotti on the largely-overlooked (and subsequently cancelled—in part by DiDio himself!) ***Superboy*** series, and a few months later, he took an executive position as DC's Vice-President—Editorial. Just over a year ago, Dan talked to *Cliff Biggers* of ***CSN*** about his background, his job, and his plans for the future. At the end of 2003, Dan and DC's Vice President—Sales & Marketing, *Bob Wayne*, made the time to talk to ***CSN*** again, following up on last year's conversation, evaluating what has happened in the twelve months since then, and looking ahead in a broad sense to what 2004 has in store for DC.

A year ago, you said, "I'm bringing some structure, some sort of sense of positioning for the three imprints—DC, Vertigo, and WildStorm. We're trying to create a sense of identity for each of the brands." Do you feel that you've made progress on that?

Dan DiDio: Somewhat. A year ago, I was sitting in a different chair than I am now; in the beginning, I was more of a "central bookkeeper" getting involved with all of DC's imprints. Then, in February I took over on the DCU side—and in doing so, one of the focuses of my job changed, so that rather than working on the three imprints, I focused on one. But I do feel that there has been a stronger positioning of all of our imprints in the past year. I'm working hard to expand and focus DC, while WildStorm and Vertigo have undergone a renewal thanks to *Scott [Dunbier]* and *Karen [Berger]*.

You've brought in some major talent to produce books that are published under the DC bullet, but aren't a part of the DC line—Elfquest, for instance, the Toe Tags horror book that Bob Schreck is assembling, Giffen & Doran's Reign of the Zodiac. Obviously you see the DC bullet as more than the DCU—will you continue to expand DC's offerings?

Dan DiDio: It's always been about what DC is. We're more than just superheroes; the fact that we had two other imprints that could siphon off some of those categories is good, but what we're trying to do is offer as many different types of product as possible by working with the best creators possible. The bottom line is this: originally, what we did is that a number of the DC editors went out and sought creators to do the best variety of books possible. In hindsight, though, we might have done better to have asked, 'Will those books do the best possible under the DC bullet?'

We will continue to search out product—and then we will find the best imprint possible for it to be published under. We *did* aggressively pursue new material, and we expanded further and faster than we thought we would do. We look at things like *Reign of the Zodiac* and we have to wonder, 'would it have sold better under this imprint or that imprint?' That falls into Bob's [*Bob Wayne's*] area—we'll find a way to make the best books possible, and then we'll work to place them under the imprint that best complements the books' content.

When we first spoke, you said, "We will do everything we can to bring top talent into DC." You've been very successful at that, particularly with writers—and several creators have renewed with DC, so they're obviously happy. Is it getting easier or harder to bring new creators in for exclusive deals?

Dan DiDio: It's certainly getting easier; it seems like we're hearing from more creators who are interested in what we have to offer. And the variety that DC has to offer is always part of the pitch. Creators aren't just coming in to work on ***Superman, Batman*** etc, They want to work with the widest diversity of characters possible. When we sign someone to an exclusive, they're exclusive to DC as a whole, so they can work under WildStorm and Vertigo as well. It's that rich variety that makes DC unique; no one can offer creators as much creative freedom and diversity as we can.

That gives us an added negotiating point to attract talent. You don't get a *Brian Azzarello* to sign an exclusive just by offering him a chance to work in the DC Universe; you get him by putting various options in front of him—options that let him explore every facet of his creativity. *Judd Winick* is doing some of the better superhero books on the stands today, but he's also able to do something as wildly experimental and different as ***Caper***. Quite honestly, these are books that we're encouraging creators to do; it helps expand DC and it helps them to expand creatively. Everyone gains from this, including the readers who get a rich variety of material they can't find from any other company.

Bob Wayne: Vertigo has a very aggressive publishing plan going into 2004, so you'll be seeing more titles from them in 2004 than you saw in 2003. The same with Wildstorm, there's stuff with both imprints that we'll be announcing in the next few months. It's too early to say what that is, but we can say that the expansion at DC is not coming at the expense of our other lines.

You've met with great success in matching top talent with DC's best-known concepts, like Batman and now Superman. Do you have more high-profile plans in the works?

Dan DiDio: Matching high-profile talent and high-profile characters—that's one great way to stir the excitement. There's a lot of great talent out there doing great comics—but there's so much out there, so many pretty good things being done for a variety of companies, that every now and then you have to set off a bomb blast to catch the readers' attention. But you can't just do the high-profile bomb-blast books all the time; that's not how you build a company.

Jim Lee has a great rep and he's doing wonderful work, but that doesn't mean that everything else isn't good, too. When Jeph and Jim do something as powerful as ***Batman***, it draws attention to the whole DC line. And it goes beyond DC; it forces everyone to get competitive, to try do a better job, both here and at our competition. Everybody should be trying to do the best job possible, competing to try to top Loeb and Lee. That's half the fun of being creative—trying to outdo the other guy!

Bob Wayne: Every issue of of *Jeph Loeb and Jim Lee's* run on ***Batman*** placed in the Top Ten—and most months, it was number one. The idea that ***Batman*** can't be a number one book is now over and done—we've seen that happen. People who might have thought that their readers wouldn't follow them to another book have seen a recent examples that prove that readers will follow creativity. I don't think ***Superman/Batman*** by *Jeph Loeb & Ed McGuinness* would have debuted as strong as it did without ***Batman*** having opened that door.

Dan DiDio: One thing that we've been working on for the past year is trust: we have to rebuilt retailer confidence in the creative decisions that come from DC. We're making every effort to improve the creative vision behind every one of our series; we believe that what we're creating is good, and we think that people are becoming more aware of that. We're building some real momentum.

Bob Wayne: And that goes beyond big-name talent. ***Wizard*** has chosen the upcoming *Brad Meltzer-Rags Morales* series ***Identity Crisis*** as their number one event for 2004, even though Brad has done only one book for us and Rags, who has done a lot of stuff for us, isn't considered a superstar... yet. Obviously a lot of the perception of what we're doing isn't hinging on superstar reputations!

Dan DiDio: In the last six to eight months, we've made a creative change on every one of our monthly books—you might not have seen them all yet, but we've made them!

> "We can't use nothing but superstars in fifty or fifty-five books a month, so one of the things we're trying to do is to bring in fresh creative visions, to stop books from becoming predictable."

Change doesn't mean that something is broken; it's not a question of the current creators not doing the job... We can't use nothing but superstars in fifty or fifty-five books a month, so one of the things we're trying to do is to bring in fresh creative visions, to stop books from becoming predictable. We think it's good for the creators and for the books.

The downside of this approach may be "creative churn." That is, you don't get as many long-term commitments that go on for years—instead, you get shorter arcs. Will that become the new norm, do you think?

Dan DiDio: What's funny about that is defining what, to answer the question, we have to determine what long-term creative continuity *is*. We're making a change on ***Legion***, and Abnett and Lanning have been on the book for five years—that's a pretty good run.

I guess to answer that, I could go back to an old sports analogy; some people say it's better to trade a player one year too early than one year too late. We're looking to get as many good stories from a creative team as they have in them. I'd rather seek out creators that have stories to tell than use people who are just filling time to get a check. No one should expect to stay on a book forever; we shouldn't expect it of creators, and creators shouldn't expect it of publishers.

It's a matter of perception. If someone's doing a year's worth of work, that's a substantial body of work by today's standards. You can look at the last twenty years of comics and you'll see that, in general, people don't stay on books for five or years any more. My question is, would you rather have *Jim Lee* on ***Batman*** for a year, knowing he's coming off after that,, or would you rather that we find someone else who'll do five years on a book without generating the excitement that Jim did?

Bob Wayne: No one's saying that we're locked into this forever, either—if someone's doing great work and the editor is happy with them, there's nothing that says we won't keep running with them And without tipping Dan's hand on this, you'll see this happen.

Dan DiDio: What we're looking at is a yearly re-evaluation of the creative teams on each of our monthly books. We want to see what the creator has accomplished in the past year and what they're hoping to do in the upcoming year. If the concept is weakening or they don't have much more to tell, then we move the creators to other projects and find someone else to take over, someone who has a strong story to tell. That way, we don't diminish the perception of our creators' talents by publishing inferior work, and we make fans happy who are following a particular creator, as well as making fans happy who are following a particular book.

It goes back to an old saying I heard once: a creator has to go to Marvel to be successful, then we'll take them seriously at DC. I think that's a load of crap. The problem is, we get creators on a book, the fans get excited, and then we leave them there until they run out of ideas. By then, we have

a character who we have to rest for a while and a creator who is perceived as having lost his edge. I'd rather say, if you've run out of stories, its okay—we'll move you to another project where you have new stories to tell.

We're getting a great response from creators; they look at it as a challenge. Rather than having to stretch a run out for three to five years, they tell their biggest, best story first—and then, if we need to we move them to another book where they can tell another big story, they know there will be a place for them.

This is helping us to entice talent back to DC. We want to challenge creators to put their best foot forward, tell their biggest, best story, and then follow that up with the next big story—whether that's on the same book or on another book. Some creators have one really great Batman story to tell, one really great JLA story, while others have several great stories to tell. We want them to tell those stories for us.

DC has been aggressive about getting more press coverage, about increasing awareness of its big projects by getting coverage both within the comics press and beyond, in places like Entertainment Weekly. Will you continue to increase DC's profile?

Dan DiDio: Yeah. It's part of any promotional plan, to try to get the most bang for the buck. We're trying to announce things in a place where we think people will hear it the loudest, and where we can generate the most excitement. We think that there's a lot of excitement to be generated; there's a lot going on here that we're proud of.

There have been times when we thought we did a great job, but the book went out with no fanfare and no noise and no one seemed to care much; creators don't like that, and I don't like that. I think that there's nothing wrong with the fact that we take pride in a book, so we make some noise and let people know where and when they can find it on the racks.

> "I'M WILLING TO WORK WITH VIRTUALLY ANY FORMAT, IF THE CREATORS HAVE A VISION THAT WILL WORK."

One thing that we won't do, though, is make noise for the sake of making noise. If we do that, then people will quit listening when we really have something to make noise about. And believe me, we have a lot to make noise about coming up in 2004... and beyond.

Bob Wayne: This approach seems to work pretty well, too. After all, we got coverage in *Entertainment Weekly* for projects like the Byrne-Claremont *JLA*—the project was covered like the big news event that it was, and that used to be unheard of in comics..

Dan DiDio: What's good is that it helps us to identify more what's best for each venue. There are some projects that are big enough that they'll generate interest from *Entertainment Weekly* or the *New York Times*, and we want to take advantage of that.

There was talk a year ago that WildStorm might produce a line of DC Universe titles featuring characters not currently in their own books; is that still a possibility?

Dan DiDio: That's already happening. We have *Vigilante* and *The Question* and *Lex Luthor: Man of Steel* right now, and *Howard Chaykin's new Challengers of the Unknown*.

The decision about the placement of these projects is really based on the creative team and the concepts themselves and how everything works out. It's an aligning of the stars sort In most the cases that I've mentioned, these were books that were put together by Jim as part of a plan for WildStorm to work with DC characters. With *Challengers of the Unknown*, it was based on the fact that Howard was doing other work for WildStorm, and it made more sense to keep this project with the same editor who was working so well with him. In that regard, we're looking for the best creative fit, where they work most comfortably with editorial to produce the best books.

Bob Wayne: There are a few books that have come out in the past year that can lead you to question if they were published under the right imprint or not. Would *Caper* have done better under a different imprint? These are things that we'll focus on more in 2004. Going forward, though, there are DC characters being produced by editors based at Wildstorm, a Vertigo book coming out from an editor based in the DCU—any time you think we have a hard and fast rule as to what is produced and published where, we can give an example where there's a porous wall. For example, Superman is touchign on all three imprints—Vertigo, WildStorm, and DCU.

DC has done pretty well with talent from beyond comics—Kevin Smith, Brad Meltzer, Patton Oswalt. Will we see more of that in 2004?

Dan DiDio: We are pursuing it, but that's a two way street—they're also pursuing us! There are a lot of people who grew up with comics, who have a true abiding love of the medium; so in addition to us searching them out, they've also found us—and they have stories to tell. We have *Kevin Anderson* coming in to do a JSA miniseries in addition to his book for WildStorm. We have *George Romero* doing *Toe Tags* with *Bob Schreck*. We went out and sought creators that we enjoy, and creators who we enjoy have sought us out as well.

Bob Wayne: Every time one of those projects comes out and meets with some degree of success, it attracts two or three other people in the same field who say, "I guess I should call these guys, too."

Dan DiDio: And the shorter arcs make it possible to work with a wider variety of creators. This is not their primary job; they're doing this out of a love of comics.. A shorter arc makes it easier for them to juggle comics work with their non-comics work. I'm willing to work with virtually any format, if the creators have a vision that will work.

We get a lot of feedback from people involved with television and film; sometime we read an interview where someone talks about his love for Superman or Batman, and we investigate to see if that's something that we can develop.

Bob Wayne: There's always been some level of this—*Sam Hamm* did a story arc for *Batman* after working on the first film, *Paul Dini & Bruce Timm* and that crew did a lot more comics work after doing the animated series. They've given us a new view of our characters in some cases, bringing in something that might not have been done by people who have been involved with these comics for years.

I think that's one thing that *Brad Meltzer* brings to *Identity Crisis*—a fresh vision. Brad's done solittle comics work that for all intents and purposes, he's still an outsider—but he has a tremendous understanding of the craft... and of storytelling.

Dan DiDio: Every time you work with a creator who comes to DC from outside the comics field, there are multiple benefits. Not only are we finding someone who has marketability and a name, but we're also finding someone who can tell stories for comics, and that's a real win. One thing that some of these outside talents are learning, though, is that it's not as simple as it sounds. Some people are excellent prose writers who would like to work with coimcs, but it's a difficult medium to work with. Not everyone can do it!

Bob Wayne: At the same time, if we have the reverse, situation with someone like Neil Gaiman, who has produced great comics and then has gone on to produce great work beyond comics. Neil is known for a variety of stuff, but his first recognition comes from his comics work, and Neil embraces that. It's nice to see him keeping a foot in the comics camp while he's working on other projects. It's the same thing with *James Robinson*,

What about Brave & Bold with Kevin Smith? a couple of years ago, he talked about doing the book for DC, and plans were made to hold the project until he finished a couple of things at Marvel. Is Brave & Bold still on hold for Kevin?

Dan DiDio: We spoke to Kevin about *Brave & Bold* relatively recently, and he realized his schedule was so hectic that it just might not happen on a viable schedule. While we'd love to keep it open for him, it looks like the project is now available. But we now have to make sure that we develop this as the proper project with the proper people to balance a project that was initialy announced for *Kevin Smith*. We don't want want fans to feel like they're having to settle for something less, and we don't want creators to feel like they're just filling a gap. We've had some creators interested, but nothing definite to announce at this moment...

I'd love to see it happen, though. *Brave & Bold* was always one of my favorite books—I remember reading an early Batman/Metal Men crossover that just fascinated me, and there was some real value to the series. It featured some great stories that just wouldn't work within the framework of any other comic. We want to recapture that distinctive energy.

Will DC continue to recruit talent from the independent market? And will there be more projects like Bizarro that offer indy talents a chance to work with DCU concepts AND maintain their indy sensibilities?

Dan DiDio: We have a second *Bizarro* up and running, if I'm not mistaken—and in some ways, we're taking a high level of risk with the DC Focus books that are coming out. They have the most independent flavor of anything coming out with the DC Bullet on it. We have to keep on tapping into that talent base, but we have to find the right projects and the right approach to allow that talent to thrive.

What led to the decision to create another venue for superheroes in the DC Focus books?

Dan DiDio: One thing that I want to clear up, in case there's any convusion: DC Focus is *not* a new superhero universe. These books are bound by a tonality, not a co-existing universe; they don't take place in the same worlds. Each book takes place in a world that is uniquely its own.

These are books that didn't fit squarely in the DC Universe. If these characters and stories existed in a world where costumed characters were running free, it would diminish a lot of the possibilities and problems that these stories present. The DC Focus idea and brand was created because all four books have a similar theme, and it gave us a way to market and promote them a something that existed outside of the DCU. We're aware that we're having difficulty launching projects that exist outside of the DCU; we're trying to find a way to call attention to these books. We've got some pretty big talent working here, beginning with Steve Gerber; these are books that deserve to be seen.

This isn't just a problem for DC—look at Marvel and Dark Horse and other companies. Look at Epic and Rocket and Tsunami. We've seen

some extremely talented creators launch books that were almost totally overlooked because they wasn't tied to some cohesive universe. It's a bigger problem that the whole industry is struggling with; we have to make readers see the variety that we have to offer, and we don't want a book to simply get lost in the shuffle. Something like DC Focus helps to create some buzz that a single book might not generate.

Some have said that DC really need something like the Ultimate line, offering a new continuity-starting-over approach to the DCU for newcomers—and some have even described Supreme Powers at Marvel as "Ultimate JLA." Have you considered a DC Silver line, or some similar DCU approach?

Dan DiDio: It's such a double-edged sword... We've considered it, and we've talked it about, but I have books now that haven't reached their full potential, and I want to focus our energies there. Until the characters that we're doing maximize their sales, we need to focus on that, not on creating a new alternative universe for those same characters, or some derivation of those characters..

Continuity can be used as a plus or a minus, and that's one of the things that we've all become acutely aware of. The reality is, we're trying to tell the best stories rather than focusing on a given universe's continuity. We're experiencing, in some cases, what we call "selective continuity"—building upon the stories that people remember most and pushing aside—maybe even ignoring entirely— the stories that have less influence on current events, or those that can actually bog down characters. People who remember the Silver Age sometimes overlook the fact that the Silver Age had a lot of stories that violated continuity; in the years since, creators have picked up the elements that worked best for them and ignored those that interfered. To a degree, we have to be willing to do that now. Books like ***JLA: Liberty & Justice*** sort of select and build their own continuity, and they do it so effectively that readers aren't at all confused or disappointed.

"Every time you work with a creator who comes to DC from outside the comics field, there are multiple benefits."

I think that success breeds continuity. The more successful the story is, the more excited people are about reading a story and building continuity from it. We're being a little looser around the edges in paying attention to the continuity of the past. What people remember most about the characters is what's important.

JLA: Liberty & Justice and ***DC—The New Frontier*** are fine examples of that: we could have forced them into continuity or put them in an Elseworlds niche, but we didn't want to diminish the attention that the books would get by doing that. Ultimately, we have to realize that DC continuity is a moving target. We tell generational sagas, but our prime characters don't age, so we have to build a continuity around that. In some cases, such as Flash and Green Lantern, continuity moves forward and dramatic changes take place—but Batman, Superman, and Wonder Woman don't change, and we have to work around that.

Bob Wayne: No one should expect that the characters are now in their late eighties because the books have been around for sixty years or so. I don't think it would make for very exciting comics.

Dan DiDio: Change for the sake of change isn't necessarily a good thing—and neither is continuity for the sake of continuity. I don't think it's the best answer. You can talk to any writer with a long run on a book and he'll tell you about stories he did that regretted—or even ignored—later on, because those stories interfered with better stories later on.

And too much attention to continuity can really hold a book back. The last thing I want is to produce a new series that has to be footnoted to death in order for people to understand it..

"The reality is, we're trying to tell the best stories rather than focusing on a given universe's continuity."

Bob Wayne: ...And footnoted with references to comics that the average reader doesn't have a copy of or doesn't have any access to, so it's an exercise in frustration.

And that leads me to a question you knew I'd ask: what's going to happen with Supergirl. It's obvious which version of Supergirl that readers want...

Dan DiDio: Who *is* Supergirl? You can ask most people who Supergirl is and they have an idea who she is—they know the story about the original Supergirl. We've spent a lot of time trying to reinvent her when the public perception didn't want that change. So we're not going to try to swim against the tide; we're going to listen to our readers.

I think that the Supergirl that the world knows is the only one who should exist, so that's what we're doing. The plan is to introduce her in a really exciting story in ***Superman/Batman***; we've got a really dramatic story that's going to be told, and it does bring Supergirl back to prominence again—in a version that everyone will recognize and accept. Then, based on the sales of that series, we'll decide what we do next with that character.

Bringing her back in this format was a complex decision, based on her role in DC history and the importance of her role in the DC Universe. We had to consider very carefully what had been done with Supergirl in ***Crisis on Infinite Earths***, too; we didn't want to nullify the importance of her role in that story.

Did the success of Peter David's Kara Zor-El story have anything to do with the decision to return to the archetypal Supergirl?

Dan DiDio: It certainly did. One of the interesting things about the *Peter David* run was that it allowed us to see what the response would be to the character. It made it clear to us who Supergirl was as far as readers are concerned.

What about these rumors that Frank Miller is doing a major Batman black and white graphic novel set in the DCU?

Dan DiDio: It may be a pat answer, but whatever Frank wants to do at DC, the door is always open. Frank has so many irons in the fire, so many projects in the works, that it's too early to say for sure what might or might not happen...

What about Frank's idea from a couple of years ago that DC produce other books set in a sort of "Dark Knight Universe"?

Dan DiDio: That door is always open for him as well, but once again it's a matter of finding the time. There are great characters that he created in his last miniseries for us, and we'd love to see him do more with it...

Bob Wayne: In his Dark Knight books, Frank created a lot of very different version of DC Universe characters that people would like to se him take a little bit further, but there's nothing he's working on that we're ready to announce at this point...

A few DC projects have been plagued by lateness—Matt Wagner's Trinity, LoEGv2. Is that a problem that can be overcome, or is it inherent in the biz?

Dan DiDio: It's an inherent part of the problem on some projects that offer a unique creative vision. We try to work out ways around that on the monthly books, but I believe people are more willing to wait on the third issue of a prestige than they are to have a monthly book come out on a bi-monthly schedule.

Ultimately, it depends on the book, the project, and the creator as to what we do. We do try to hold back or stockpile material so that we can come closer to hitting a schedule, but problems can still occur. We'll do whatever we can to make sure that we stay true to the schedule, but we're walking a tightrope.

When fans know that, say, *Alan Moore & Kevin O'Neill* have been working on ***League of Extraordinary Gentlemen Vol 2*** for almost a year, are they willing to wait for several more months until everything is done, or do they want to see the work right then, even though it means that there might be delays further down the line?

Now that Supergirl is returning in one form or another, are there other iconic characters like her—and perhaps Hal Jordan as Green Lantern—who'll be coming back? Perhaps the Barry Allen Flash, for instance?

Dan DiDio: It's not something we decide on the spur of the moment. We look, we re-evaluate, we try to remember and decide what would make the best sense for every one of our characters.

Green Lantern is a priority for us, and it is an important series—in fact, in all honesty I think Green Lantern is the fourth best recognized brand in the DCU. Whatever we can do to enhance the value of that character and that franchise, we will do. And I can assure you that big things are planned for Green Lantern this year—but I can't necessarily tell you what they are!

One thing I can say with relative certainty, though: you'll never see the Barry Allen Flash return. I think Barry served his purpose, and I think Barry is the staple that holds Crisis together, and to bring him back would serve no purpose. Besides, I think we have a very good Flash in Wally West, and his existence honors Barry Allen very effectively.

Bob Wayne: But you can still have stories et in the past that feature Barry Allen.He's prominently featured in both ***JLA—Liberty & Justice*** and ***DC—The New Frontier***, and I'm sure that we'll see him in other projects down the line.

Dan DiDio: That's right; there will *always* be stories to tell. ***New Frontier*** couldn't work at all without Barry Allen. But in continuity, we won't be bringing him back. There's no need

So where will DC be a year from now?

Dan DiDio: I think a year from now, we'll be an even stronger company. When readers see what we have to offer, they'll realize that the excitement of 2003 was just the beginning of a long-term plan to move DC to the top, both creatively and in terms of popularity. And if anyone thinks that's not possible—well, a year ago most everyone said it wasn't possible to make ***Batman*** the number one comic, either...

The Games People Play

by Brett Brooks

Eberr-On The Horizon

Wizards of the Coast has released their shipping schedule from this summer, and right at the top of the list is the winner of the design a world contest, *Eberron*. Created by Keith Baker, was chosen from the 11,000 submissions sent into WOTC. *Eberron* is a new fantasy setting filled with swashbuckling adventure and pulp adventure. The core book is filled with new character races, monsters, prestige classes, feats, organizations and much more. The core book contains information for both players and gamemasters, letting a campaign get started with just one book. *Eberron* will be out in June for the suggested retail price of $39.95. In August, the first adventure for the *Eberron* setting, *Shadows of the Last War*, hits the shelves for $9.95.. This stand-alone adventures is designed to help showcase the unique qualities of the world.

Also due out this summer is *The Complete Divine: A Player's Guide to Divine Magic for all Classes*, which has a pretty hefty title—and some hefty contents to go with it! It also has information on gods and their powers, writing up new deities for the *D&D* setting, and expanding on what characters—including several new prestige classes—can do in service of their gods. It should hit shelves in May for $29.95. In addition to *Eberron*, June will see the final scheduled release for the *Star Wars Role-Playing Game, Ultimate Adversaries*. Similar to *Ultimate Aliens*, this hardcover presents a huge collection of characters from all eras of *Star Wars*, and will retail for $29.95.

In July, *The Planar Handbook: A Player's Guide to the Planes* is designed to let characters utilize the various planes of the *D&D* setting in any campaign. All of the confusion is put aside as they are laid out in simple means, and segmented to allow you to add what you need for your individual game. *The Planar Handbook* will retail for $29.95. The new *Forgotten Realms* sourcebook, *Serpent Kingdoms*, will also debut in July for $29.95. This rules supplement provides information on the various serpent related races of the Realms, as dictated by the creator of *The Forgotten Realms*, *Ed Greenwood*.

And to take things one step further, WOTC will release *d20 Future* in August. This expansion on the *d20 Modern* game lets you take your game to a time unheard of—or at least that hasn't arrived yet. A world, or maybe a universe, of rules is presented in the $34.95 hardcover, including guides for classes, occupations, gear, vehicles, starships, aliens, and much more.

Of course, not *everything* from Wizards is a role-playing game. In fact, the new *Star Wars Miniatures Game* due out in August re-focuses the *Star Wars* franchise for WOTC. The game is set in the classic era of *Star Wars* (translate as: "the original three movies"), and comes in both starters and boosters. There are sixty figures in the series, including all of the major character from the three movies.

The other miniature game from Wizards—y'know, the one based on *Dungeons and Dragons*—has another new expansion coming out in June, and this one is *big*. In fact, it's called *Giants of Legend*, and its got some massive figures in it. And though it was previously reported that this expansion would have two different sizes of boxes, one with a giant figure and one without, now there will just be one size: *The Huge Pack*. These packs will come with one oversized figure and seven standard figures for the retail price of $15.99.

As you can see, it's going to be a really big summer from Wizards of the Coast—and it's just a lead-in to this fall's big event: The Thirtieth Anniversary of *D&D*. Big things are coming. Let's give you a couple of teasers. How about a trivia game for *Dungeons and Dragons*? Or a coffee table hardcover that explores the entirety of the game from its inception to present day? Well, these things are coming, and *CSN* will be there to tell you about them.

Exalting On Players

Exalted is the hottest thing from White Wolf since the World of Darkness (which is a good thing, since they've brought the WoD setting to a close). And a hot thing is just getting hotter. *The Exalted Player's Guide* is a new hardcover that gives new vital information for players and gamemasters alike. Included in this release are merits and flaws, mortal sorcery, mass combat, and much more. How much more? How about taking your Essence about five? That's a pretty big step for such a little Anathema. Look for *The Exalted Player's Guide* this spring for the suggested retail price of $29.99.

And even though the World of Darkness is dead—or Ascended, or Gehenna-ed, or Apocalypsed—don't let it be forgotten. *Hunter: The Reckoning* has been optioned for a feature film by Uwe Boll and Brightlight Pictures. "*Hunter* has become one of our most successful mass-media properties," said White Wolf's President, *Mike Tinney*, "and we're thrilled to see it head toward the big screen." Boll has already been involved with taking other games and bringing them to the big screen, most notably the upcoming *Alone in the Dark* feature film. "This game provides a great opportunity to produce an exciting feature film," added Uwe Boll. "We look forward to capturing the unique and frightening qualities of *Hunter: The Reckoning*." Look for a *Hunter* to hit the big screen near you sometime in the future.

Comics Are In The Cards Again

Even though the game hasn't been released yet, Upper Deck already has another game that is compatible with the *Marvel Universe CCG*. This July they will release *The DC Comics CCG*, letting players pit their favorite heroes against their favorite villains in head-to-head battles. Like the Marvel game, the *DC Comics CCG* will use all original artwork. The game will be released in forty-card starters and fourteen-card boosters. While not directly designed to be used together, both the Marvel and DC game will use the "VS" game system created by Upper Deck.

Red Star Dawns At Green Ronin

It's no secret that the guys at Archangel Studios are gamers—they've even produced their own unique d20 supplement. This time out, they aren't going to do things themselves, instead reaching an agreement with Green Ronin Publishing to produce a d20 game based on their hit comic series, *The Red Star*. All of the characters and settings of the rich Red Star universe will be brought to life in a new game that will utilize the upcoming *d20 Future* rules (see the story in this issue!). Archangel Studios will provide the artwork for this new series, bringing the magical fantasy world of Soviet Russia to life. *The Red Star Role-Playing Game* is tentatively scheduled for release this summer.

Decipher Goes For Mega Entertainment

MegaMan, meet Captain Kirk. Decipher, home of the *Star Trek* CCG, will be producing a new collectible card game based on the hit video game and TV show, *MegaMan: NT Warrior* from ShoPro Entertainment. "With an amazing track record in the videogame market and more recent success in the world of television, *MegaMan: NT Warrior* is an incredible property" said *Warren Holland*, Decipher Chairman and CEO. "We're proud to be among the licensees preparing to take the property to a whole new level in 2004. We believe *MegaMan: NT Warrior* will be the next major toy and game phenomenon." The initial set will be around 130-cards, plus an additional four-card booster is hoping to have the game out by the end of May, about the same time that the new season of the show hits the airwaves on the Kids WB.

Honor Your Role-Playing Game

The folks who brought you *Traveller T20* are heading back into space for a new role-playing experience. QLI has acquired the rights to produce a role-playing game based on the *Honor Harrington* series of novels by *David Weber*. The game will use the T20 system developed for QLI's Traveller game.

"*Traveller* and *Honor Harrington* are a near perfect fit" QLI President *Hunter Gordon* said. "The fundamental concepts behind the various *Traveller* systems and the *Honor Harrington* universe are very similar, harkening to a classic wet navy approach to naval operations in the far future. By using *Traveller* as our core, we can concentrate on presenting the setting to the fans which is ultimately what the game is all about." No release date has been announced for the game, but *CSN* will keep you updated.

UberGaming

The American game publisher Uberplay hasn't been around for long, but they already made a big splash in the gaming biz. Their first game, *New England*, by *Alan R. Moon & Aaron Weissblum*, won the *Games Magazine* Game of the Year award for 2004 while another game, *WildLife*, won the magazine's Advanced Strategy Game of the Year. Not bad for a game company that has been publishing games for less than a year!

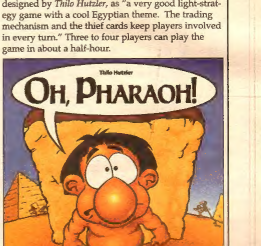
For 2004, Uberplay has a new line of small box card and board games up their sleeve that are designed to be quick, fun, and inexpensive. These are full featured games from such famous game designers as *Wolfgang Kramer* and *Reiner Knizia*. "We are very excited about this new line," Uberplay head honcho *Jeremy Young* said about the games, which kicks off with *Manga Manga, Oh Pharaol, Saga*, and *Spy*. "Combine the low price with high-quality game play, German quality components and world-renown game authors, and we feel that we have a product that will be very successful!".

Saga, designed by famous game designer *Wolfgang Kramer* (responsible for *ElGrande, Tikal,* and *Princes of Florence*) along with *Horst-Rainer Rosner*. "*Wolfgang Kramer* has produced another winner with our small box game *Saga*," Young said. "It's amazing how much of a game he can pack into such a small space! Fans will love this "territory-conquering" game. For those who haven't played a Kramer game, *Saga* is a great place to start."

In *Saga*, there are six countries to be conquered. Each player musters his knights to attack the countries and claim them as their own. Once a country has been claimed, its conqueror gains a special power. You must still defend your claimed countries, though, your countries may be re-conquered by another player! At the end of the game, the player who has the best forces as well as the most fame from his conquered countries wins the game. The game is for two to four players ages 12 and up and plays in about 340 minutes.

In *Oh Pharaol*, the best architects of their time are building pyramids as burial grounds for the divine king. However, a battle between the master builders erupts: who constructs the most magnificent pyramids? The architects then battle amongst themselves to build the best pyramids on behalf of the all-powerful pharaoh.

This is a card game where players use the cards to build pyramids. You are attempting to build pyramids worth the most points but beware—other players will make your life difficult with thief cards which steal cards from your players' pyramids as well as tax collectors who can steal cards from your hand. Young describes the game, which was designed by *Thilo Hutzler*, as "a very good light-strategy game with a cool Egyptian theme. The trading mechanism and the thief cards keep players involved in every turn." Three to four players can play the game in about a half-hour.



Manga Manga, is, not surprisingly, inspired by Japanese manga. Designed by *Peter Neugebauer*, this is a card game where players play brave heroes who enter the arena to do battle. Young describes the game as being "a very fun, fast-action card game where everyone gets to play at the same time. The Manga theme is great and will appeal to a wide range of gamers. The twists to this game are the special consolation disks that losers receive that can be turned in for special actions that can help you catch up to the leader."

In the game, players are dealt warrior cards. The game begins with a cry of "Action Power!" and then mayhem starts. Players try to get rid of their cards by playing warriors to vanquish other players' warriors. There are no turns—if you see a warrior on the table and you have the right warrior to defeat him, slam it down on the table! Once a player has gotten rid of all of his cards, the battle ends and that player awarded a victory disk. The loser of the battle gets a consolation disk, which will help him in later battles. More battles are played and at the end, the player with the most victory points on his victory disks wins the game! *Manga Manga*, designed for two to six players ages ten and up, can be played in about thirty minutes.

Renowned game designer *Reiner Knizia* is responsible for Ubergame's fourth offering, the espionage game *Spy*. "This game has a press-your-luck feel to it," Young said. "I think this is Knizia's best small game since *Lost Cities*."

In *Spy*, you're the head of a spy ring, sending out spies to a number of different targets. The other players are also sending their spies out to these same targets and the more spies on a target, the harder it is to send more spies there. The first player to assign all of his spies wins the game.

Priced at about $16.95, each of these games should be available later this month. Since not all comic shops carry all boardgames, you should let your retailer know if you are interested in any of these new games.

Rick Thornquist

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